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SUBJECT: DMK PRESSURE TACTICS EMBARRASS CONGRESS; SUSPENSE CONTINUES
ON POSSIBLE OUTCOME

REF: Chennai 344

11. (SBU) Summary: After setting a two-week deadline for the Government of India to force a ceasefire in Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK party is going full steam on a campaign in support of Sri Lankan Tamils. The DMK's 20 Members of Parliament have handed over resignations to Chief Minister Karunanidhi, entrusting him to forward the letters to the Center if the Center fails to enforce a ceasefire in Sri Lanka. DMK's ally, the Congress, has distanced itself from the DMK's aggressive stance on the issue but fears that the UPA might lose a major ally in South India if the DMK pushes ahead with the protest. In what may have been a move to placate Congress and the GOI, Tamil Nadu police arrested Vaiko, the brash pro-LTTE politician of Tamil Nadu. Observers still believe GOI initiatives in Sri Lanka would help the DMK claim success and remain in their parliamentary seats but they know fully well that the decision rests entirely with an unpredictable 85-year old man, Chief Minister Karunanidhi. End Summary

DMK Steps up pressure, keeps up suspense

12. (SBU) Tamil Nadu's ruling party and Congress' principal ally in South India, the DMK, is going ahead with an intensive campaign in support of the Sri Lankan Tamils. In an effort to step up pressure on the Government of India, Chief Minister Karunanidhi has demanded and secured the resignation letters of all 20 Members of Parliament belonging to the DMK (16 Lok Sabha members including 7 Union Ministers, and 4 Rajya Sabha members including Karunanidhi's daughter Kanimozhi). Karunanidhi evidently intends to forward these resignation letters to the Center if the GOI fails to secure a ceasefire in Sri Lanka by October 28. On October 24, the DMK planned to make a "human chain", rallying about 100,000 people to highlight the cause of Sri Lankan Tamils (heavy rains, however, appeared to have caused fewer supporters than expected to turn up). There is clearly an effort to show that the DMK's is not an empty threat, but a serious effort to stop the war in the island even if it means pulling out its Ministers from the Union government and its MPs from the Union Parliament.

13. (SBU) DMK strongman and Tamil Nadu Power Minister Arcot Veerasamy (protect) indicated to Consul General Simkin on October 22 that he is unsure what would happen after the October 28 deadline of the DMK. He declined to speculate whether the resignations of the party MPs would be carried out, but said that he does not have much hope that Sri Lanka would end the ongoing war on the LTTE. He acknowledged the diplomatic initiatives GOI has undertaken and said humanitarian assistance has begun to move to the affected areas in Northern Sri Lanka. He said a high level Sri Lankan team might visit New Delhi shortly to hold discussions with GOI and Indian External Affairs Minister Mukherjee might visit Sri Lanka to impress upon Sri Lanka the need to avoid civilian casualties. These developments, however, may not satisfy the DMK leadership.

Congress irked by DMK's aggressive stance

14. (SBU) Veerasamy indicated that the DMK campaign is indeed causing tension between the party and its national ally, the Congress. He said the harsh criticism of Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Singh made at a film stars' rally in Rameshwaram in support of Sri Lankan Tamils had angered the Congress leaders in Tamil Nadu who had been together with the DMK at the all party meeting (Reftel). Meanwhile the media reported that the Congress MPs from Tamil Nadu would not tender their resignations without the consent of the party high command.

Balancing act: Pro-LTTE leader Vaiko arrested

15. (SBU) In what may have been an effort to show a balanced stance by the TNG, Tamil Nadu state police arrested Vaiko, the pro-LTTE leader of the MDMK party, on October 23. The charge against him is that he made a seditious speech at Chennai saying he would not hesitate to take up arms in support of Sri Lankan Tamils. Journalists told Post that the arrest of Vaiko indicated the unwillingness of the Government of Tamil Nadu to confront the Center on the issue. Speaking to the press at the time of his arrest, Vaiko maintained that what he meant was taking up arms against Sri Lanka, not against India.

LTTE High Voltage Campaign on

16. (SBU) The LTTE and its Tamil Nadu supporters have stepped up a campaign to raise a wave of sympathy for the suffering Tamils across the Pak Straits. Hundreds of copies of a 45-minute DVD featuring

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the sufferings of Tamils in Northern Sri Lanka are currently doing the rounds in Chennai. Visuals of aerial raids, wounded and dead children, shattered homes and schools, displaced Tamils on the move, spirited LTTE rallies upholding large pictures of Prabhakaran, and voices urging Tamils of Tamil Nadu to raise their voice against the Government of India's support to the Government of Sri Lanka are the highlights of the short film. Veerasamy told us that he has watched the DVD. Tamil TV channels have aired brief excerpts of the DVD. Efforts are on to widely circulate the DVD among Tamil youths and students, who, unlike their previous generation, have much less pan-Tamil sentiments.

DMK-Congress rift unlikely, but can't say for sure

17. (SBU) COMMENT: The Congress might not take the DMK's aggressive stance on the issue lightly if Karunanidhi pushes the resignations of its MPs and Union Ministers. Only months away from Lok Sabha elections, the UPA coalition could then face a serious threat of unraveling. Already unpopular with long power outages, the DMK would then be in worse shape if it loses its alliance with the Congress. Moreover, the DMK state government's survival depends critically on the support of the Congress as the DMK does not have a majority of its own. For these reasons, it is difficult to imagine Karunanidhi pushing ahead with the resignations of the MPs after the 28th. However, people familiar with the quirks of Tamil Nadu politics would hesitate to predict, knowing fully well that the decision would entirely be that of an 85-year old man who sees himself as the "father" of world Tamils. CM Karunanidhi may take a long view, and it is possible that he considers that his party's prospects, and the political careers of his sons and daughter, might be enhanced by a dramatic gesture in support of suffering Tamils.

End Comment

SIMKIN